



Photos L to R: Three Springs Farms, Celina Burkhardt

# Ripe for the Pickin'

Tulsa Farmers' Markets overflow with opportunities for healthy eating and community building

By Jessica Render

**T**he nation is going green. Or, maybe, the nation is listening to environmentalists and celebrities tell them why they should go green. Nonetheless, people are at least thinking about what goes into the environment. So, why not what we put into our bodies?

Farmers' Markets are a time honored spring and summer tradition across the nation and around the world. The weather warms and the plants grow, while you and I can eat better.

So, why make a special trip just to get items you can purchase at your local grocer? More selection, better quality, marked freshness, richer taste, it's organic, it's safer, it's pesticide free, not to mention that warm, fuzzy feeling you get from supporting your local farmer ... to name a few.

Farmers' Markets also offer many foods you won't find at your weekly trip to Wal-Mart, like heirloom tomatoes and other "fresh, picked that morning" fruits and vegetables, ripened to perfection.

"Even with splitting and some blemishes, the customers know the taste of a Cherokee

Purple is good enough to write home about!" raved Rita Scott, Green Country coordinator for the "Buy Fresh, Buy Local" campaign.

Buy Fresh, Buy Local is a national campaign that spans 20 states, including Oklahoma. The mission of the program is to promote community solidarity and to increase individual support of local farms by helping bridge the gap between consumers and farmers. The title says it all: Feel good about what you eat, feel good about what you buy.

Farmers' Markets offer a variety of products ranging from the obvious fresh produce, herbs, fruits and berries to soaps, plants, flowers and arts & crafts. Many also offer meats, cheeses and baked goods. Tip for the avid shopper: okgrown.com posts a list telling you exactly what is in season when, a great resource.

Farmers' Markets connect you directly to the source, no middlemen with their questionably kept storerooms; and the products don't have to travel hundreds or thousands of miles before they reach you, guaranteeing optimum freshness.

Annette Riherd of the Owasso market said that each vendor who works with them has their own page on the Owasso Farmers' Market Web site, which provides the customer with a direct look at photos and more information about each vendor so "you can get a feel for the vendors ahead of time," Riherd explained. The site also provides contact information if you wish to get in touch with the farmers outside of the market setting, which is something else a chain grocer can't offer.

Scott agreed, adding, "You can get the story of how the food is grown. From farm to plate, you can trace it back to its origin." To be a part of this love-fest, farmers/vendors pay a small yearly fee which grants them access to the markets.

If you're convinced on the why, here's the where. In Tulsa, you have a variety of options. The Cherry Street Farmers' Market was the first of its kind in the area; it opened in 1998 after the creators tired of having to travel to get fresh, organic produce. The reaction to the market was so positive they decided to branch out and add a second location in Brookside.

"It's the atmosphere that keeps people coming back," said Cherry Street market's manager, Lisa Brandborg. "Our friendly vendors, eating breakfast prepared by local chefs, visiting with family and friends while enjoying a beautiful morning all make for a relaxing experience."

Both markets host special events from live music to educational opportunities. The Cherry Street Market is open every Saturday starting April 11<sup>th</sup> from 7am to 11am; the Brookside market follows on Wednesdays starting May 6<sup>th</sup> from 8am to 12pm.

Not a morning person? Pearl Farmers' Market on 6<sup>th</sup> and Peoria in Centennial Park is the only evening market in Tulsa. Running from April 23 through September 24 on Thursdays from 4:30pm- 7pm, you can find vendors ranging from backyard gardeners to big field farmers. They also have fun activities for the kids (remember making bird feeders out of peanut butter, seeds, and pine cones!) that are free of cost.

Our city also boasts the North Tulsa Farmers' Market on the Newsome Community Farm, running June through October on Saturdays from 8:30am-12:30pm, and the Downtown Farmers Market on Third and Boston at William's Green, running from May 20 through October on Tuesdays from 10:30am-2pm.

Still haven't had your fill? Across the bridge (rather, on the bridge) Jenks holds their own Farmers' Market in the parking lot of the pedestrian bridge between Riverwalk Crossing and the Oklahoma Aquarium. You'll find fresh produce and fruit here, of course, but they do have one thing that's a little different: "lunch in a bag," a collection of organic produce (contents varying, but usually including tomatoes, squash, onion and fresh herbs among other items), ripe for a meal.

And if you're up for a mini road trip, check out the Farmers' Markets in Bartlesville, Claremore, Collinsville, Muskogee, Okmulgee, Owasso and Sperry.

Bon Appétit. 